

XII. *An Account of the Plague, at Aleppo:
In a Letter to the Rev. Charles Lyttelton,
LL. D. Dean of Exeter, now Lord Bishop
of Carlisle, and F. R. S. from the Reverend
Mr. Thomas Dawes, Chaplain to the
Factory at Aleppo.*

Sir,

Aleppo, October the 26th, 1762.

Read Feb. 24.
1763. **T**HE unexpected continuance of the plague in this city during the whole past winter having prevented the English ships, that brought me your favour of October 16th 1761, from receiving any thing on board from hence, I have been obliged thus long to defer paying my respects to you, and rendering my grateful acknowledgments for your generous concern and good wishes for my safety.

Tho' I find by experience, that accounts given in news papers of occurrences in this distant quarter of the Globe seldom deserve much credit, yet I cannot contradict the report you mention of the plague's raging here in the summer of 1761. You probably will have had it confirmed long since, and also have heard of the accumulated distresses we have lately been labouring under : but as the particulars may not have reached you, I will venture to communicate them, tho' it is a subject neither pleasing to me to dwell on, nor can be very agreeable to you to read. Would to God! I could even now assure you they are at an end.

On

On the mercy of his protecting Providence has been our sole reliance; nothing else could have supported us under the many apprehensions and dangers we have been daily exposed to.

This unhappy country for six years past has been in a very terrible situation, afflicted during the greatest part of that time with many of the Almighty's severest scourges. Its troubles were ushered in by a very sharp winter in 175⁶/₇, which destroyed almost all the fruits of the earth. The cold was so very intense, that the Mercury of Farenheit's thermometer, exposed a few minutes to the open air, sunk entirely into the ball of the tube. Millions of olive-trees, that had withstood the severity of 50 winters, were blasted in this, and thousands of souls perished merely thro' cold. The failure of a crop the succeeding harvest occasioned an universal scarcity, which in this country of indolence and oppression (where provision is only made from hand to mouth, and where, literally speaking, no man is secure of reaping what he has sown) soon introduced a famine with all its attendant miseries. The shocking accounts related to me on this subject would appear fabulous, were they not confirmed by numberless eye-witnesses, both Europeans and natives. In many places the inhabitants were driven to such extremities, that women were known to eat their own children, as soon as they expired in their arms, for want of nourishment.--Numbers of persons from the mountains and villages adjacent came daily to Aleppo, to offer their wives and children to sale for a few dollars, to procure a temporary subsistence for themselves; and hourly might be seen in our streets dogs and human creatures scratching

scratching together on the same dunghill, and quarrelling for a bone, or piece of carrion, to allay their hunger. A pestilence followed close to the heels of the famine, which lasted the greatest part of 1758, and is supposed to have swept away 50 or 60 thousand souls in this city and its environs. I bless God, I was not a spectator of this complicated scene of misery: the very description of it must distress a compassionate disposition; the sight of it must have made an impression on an heart of flint.

I have already acquainted you, in a former letter, with our troubles by earthquakes, &c. of 1759 and 1760 and therefore shall proceed from the date of my last letter. The latter end of March 1761, the plague, which had lain dormant since the autumn, made its appearance again in this city, and alarmed us considerably. Tho' I confess, it did not surprize me; so far from not expecting its return, I should have looked on it almost as a miracle, if we had escaped, after the little progress it had made among us the preceding year. The infection crept gently and gradually on, confined chiefly to one particular quarter, till the beginning of May, when it began to spread visibly and universally. We shut up on the 27th, and our confinement lasted 96 days. The fury indeed of the contagion did not continue longer than the middle of July, and many of our merchants went abroad with caution early in August; but as our consul had no urgent business to induce him to expose himself to any risk, we remained in close quarters till we could visit our friends with tolerable security. As an addition to the uneasiness of our situation, the earthquakes re-

truned the latter end of April, tho' with no great violence, except the first shock, and that much less terrible than those of 1759. We felt 6 or 7 within the week, and 4 more at long intervals during our imprisonment; but as they were all slight, our apprehensions soon subsided. At our release from confinement the last day of August, we flattered ourselves with the hopes of a speedy release from danger; but it pleased God to order it otherwise. In all the plagues, with which Aleppo has been visited in this century, the contagion is said to have regularly and constantly ceased in August or September, the hottest months in the year; and it is pretty certain, that it disappeared about that time in 1742, 1743, 1744 and 1760; but unfortunately for us that now reside here, the year 1761 has proved an instance of the fallacy of general observations on this dreadful subject; for, from the end of March 1761 to the middle of Sept. 1762, scarce a day has passed without some deaths or fresh attacks from the distemper; and tho' the violence of it ceased in the autumn, yet I believe on an average it was fatal to at least 30 persons in every week, from that time to the end of the winter. In February last we were pretty healthy: hearing but of few accidents, and those in the skirts of the city, we once more began to entertain some faint hopes of a farther exemption, but they were of very short duration: in March the infection spread again, and in April increased with such rapidity, that we were obliged to retire to our close quarters on the 26th of that month. I have now the satisfaction of informing you that, by the blessing of Providence, we are once more safe and at liberty,

liberty, tho' after a confinement more tedious, and much more dismal than even that of the last year; we got abroad on the 18th of August, when the burials were reduced to about 20 a day: the infection gradually decreased till the middle of September, since which time we have heard of no accident. May the Almighty graciously be pleased to prevent the return of a distemper, whose very name strikes terror whenever it is mentioned and is undoubtedly one of the most lamentable misfortunes, that mankind is liable to.

I wish I could with any precision determine our loss in the two last summers; but, in times of such general horror and confusion, it is in a manner impossible to come at the exact truth. If you enquire of the natives, they swell the account each year from 40 to 60 thousand, and some even higher; but, as the eastern disposition to exaggaration reigns at present almost universally, little accuracy is to be expected from them: this however is certain, that the mortality of this year has been very considerable, perhaps not much inferior to any in this century. Some of the Europeans have been at no small pains and expence to procure a regular and daily list of the funerals during our confinement, and their account amounts to about twenty thousand, from the 1st of April to the 1st of September this year, and about one third less the preceding summer. This calculation I am inclined to think is pretty right, tho' there are some strong objections against a probability of being able to procure a just one in such circumstances: for the Turks keep no register of the dead, and have

72 different public burial places in the 7 miles circumference of the city, besides many private ones within the walls. The Christians and Jews, who are supposed to be rather less than a seventh part of the number of inhabitants, have registers, and each nation one burial place only : their loss this year is about 3500 in the five months.

I will not shock your compassionate disposition by a detail of the miseries I have been witness to, but only mention, that during the months of June and July, (in the greatest part of which the burials were from 2 to 300 a day,) the noise of men singing before the corps in the day, and the shrieks of women for the dead both day and night, were seldom out of our ears. Custom soon rendered the first familiar to me; but nothing could reconcile me to the last; and as the heat obliges us to sleep on the terrace of our houses in the summer, many of my nights rest was disturbed by these alarms of death.

I bless God, all my countrymen have been so fortunate as to escape any infection in their houses, tho' each year 4 or 5 Europeans have been carried off, and each year the plague broke out in two houses that join to ours. In one of them this year died a Franciscan Priest, after two days illness, whose bed was placed about six yards distance from mine. I believe I was in no great danger, as a wall 9 or 10 feet high separated our terraces; but had I known his situation, I should have moved farther off. The year before, I was thrown into a very great agitation of mind for a few days, by the death of my landress's husband; for the very day he died of the plague, my servant

had received my linen from his house, and I had carelessly put on some of it, even without airing. This accident happened many weeks after we were open, and his illness was industriously kept a secret. The last month of my confinement this year passed very heavily with me indeed; for I found my health much disordered. Whether it proceeded from a cold I caught in my head by sleeping in the open air in some very windy nights; from want of exercise; or from the uneasiness of mind naturally attending our melancholy situation, I know not; but my nerves seemed all relaxed, my spirits in a state of dejection unknown to me before, and my head so heavy and confused, that I could neither write nor read for an hour together with application or pleasure. Since our release, I have passed a month at a garden about an hour's ride from the city, for the sake of exercise and fresh air, and find myself much relieved by it, tho' my head is far from being yet clear.

Among many particulars relating to the present plague, that I have heard, the following anecdotes seem somewhat extraordinary; and yet, as they are well attested, I have no reason to doubt of the truth of them; viz. Last year as well as this, there has been more than one instance of a woman's being delivered of an infected child, with the plague sores on its body, tho' the mother herself has been entirely free from the distemper.

A woman, that suckled her own child of 5 months, was seized with a most severe plague, and died after a week's illness; but the child, tho' it sucked her, and lay in the same bed with her during her whole disorder,

order, escaped the infection. A woman upwards of an hundred years of age was attacked with the plague, and recovered: her two grandchildren of 10 and 16 received the infection from her, and were both carried off by it.

While the plague was making terrible ravage in the island of Cyprus, in the spring of 1760, a woman remarkably sanguine and corpulent, after losing her husband and two children, who died of the plague in her arms, made it her daily employment from a principle of charity to attend all her sick neighbours, that stood in need of her assistance, and yet escaped the infection. Also a Greek lad made it his business for many months to wait on the sick, to wash, dress and bury the dead, and yet he remained unhurt. In that contagion ten men were said to die to one woman; but the persons, to whom it was almost universally fatal, were youths of both sexes. Many places were left so bare of inhabitants, as not to have enough left, to gather in the fruits of the earth: it ceased entirely in July 60, and has not appeared in the island since.

The plague seems this year to have been in a manner general over a great part of the Ottoman empire. We have advice of the havoc it has made at Constantinople, Smyrna, Salonicha, Brusa, Adena, Antioch, Antab, Killis, Ourfah, Diarbekir, Mousol, and many other large towns and villages. Scanderoon, for the first time I believe this century, has suffered considerably: the other Frank settlements on the sea-coast of Syria have been exempted, excepting a few accidents at Tripoli, which drove the English consul,

ful, Mr. Abbott, into a close retirement for a week or two; but the storm soon blew over.

I am, with the greatest respect,

Sir,

Your most obliged and most

obedient humble servant,

Thomas Dawes.

November 4th, 1762.

P. S. Praise be to the Almighty, we still continue free from any bad accident: the 40 days necessary for a clean bill of health are expired; and the Reward, Captain Saunders, is taking in her loading for England.